

Business of health

Making sure medical system is proper fit for local community



LEONARD E. REDON

GUEST
ESSAYIST

Community planning has long been a fundamental part of Rochester's health care system. Put simply, Rochester has garnered national recognition for its ability to deliver quality health care at a lower price than most of the nation because, as a community, we didn't overbuild the system.

Excess capacity, meaning more services or facilities than the community needs, generally leads to increased use and costs without necessarily improving patient care. With today's increased health care costs, tighter economy and job reductions, if facilities or practitioners build or acquire more services than the community can use, the local health care system will be threatened.

Health care systems are under intense pressure from consumers and employers to control soaring medical costs. The resurgence of medical inflation and the increasing use of medical services have driven recent insurance premium increases and are threatening the affordability of health care across

the nation.

Cost drivers include new treatments and diagnostic services, more people using more services and the increasing cost of services. The costs of medications, outpatient care and physician services appear to be the fastest rising of all cost drivers nationally.

As the Rochester community increases its focus on our local health care system, the Community Technology Assessment Advisory Board continues to play an active role.

CTAAB makes recommendations on the acquisition of health care services and technologies. Established in 1993, CTAAB has reviewed projects in Monroe County and the Finger Lakes region, with the intent to continue the Rochester area's commitment to cooperation in health care planning and cost containment.

CTAAB is an independent board of business leaders, health care consumers, local insurers, physician organizations and health institutions who share an interest in local health care.

The CTAAB mission is to review health care projects in the areas of new or expanded medical services, new or expanded technology and major capital expenditures requested by public and private health care providers.

CTAAB reviews these proposals, taking into consideration existing capacity, demand for the service or technolo-

gy and its possible effect on the entire community. CTAAB then offers a recommendation, based on a board vote, to the health care community.

Local insurers use CTAAB's non-binding decisions to help formulate their reimbursement policy relative to the reviewed project. The community benefits from this cooperative approach among physicians, providers, community members and payers alike.

One example of our success is that CTAAB has monitored the capacity and utilization of MRI units for nearly 10 years.

And, the Finger Lakes region's MRI procedure rate is 19 percent less than the national rate, and 28 percent less than the state rate.

To improve its reviews, CTAAB has partnered with the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency to provide data and needs analysis, reassessed its board representation and improved its application process.

CTAAB remains committed to ensuring patient access to beneficial technology and high quality care while assuring costs in the community do not rise unnecessarily.

CTAAB welcomes community input into its decision-making process. □

Redon is chairman, Community Technology Assessment Advisory Board.